

Child Welfare

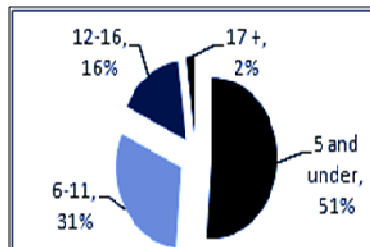
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Purpose

Child welfare services are directed at three outcomes – safety for children at risk, permanency, and child and family well-being. The DHS provides services for children who have been or are at-risk of being abused or neglected, and for children determined to be a child in need of assistance (CINA).

Who

Age of Abuse, Neglect Victims



- Over half of abuse or neglect victims are age 5 or under.
- Eighty percent of all abuse is neglect, known as “denial of critical care.” Many abusers in this category have substance abuse or mental health problems. Physical abuse accounts for 9 percent of abuse.
- The greatest risk factors for abuse are parental substance abuse, mental illness, and domestic violence.
- See a one-page snapshot of child welfare numbers: <http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/docs/childwelfarebynumbers2009.pdf>

What

The department:

- Investigates reports of child abuse to determine if the child is safe and whether abuse has occurred. During SFY 2010, DHS completed 26,194 child abuse assessments. Abuse or neglect is “founded” in about a third of these investigations. Founded abusers are placed on the child abuse registry.
- Provides services to maintain safety at home for children who have been abused or neglected. If safety at home is not possible, the department arranges temporary out-of-home placement, first seeking relatives to help. Other options include family foster care, group care, shelter care, and supervised apartment living.
- Provides permanency services, including family reunification, adoption and guardianship.
- Assists foster care youth aged 16 to 18 to prepare for adulthood, and provides extensive support for aged-out youth who have jobs or are in school.
- Works with communities to prevent child abuse and develop community partnerships for child protection.

How are We Doing?

Beginning in 2005, the department launched a redesigned child welfare system. Iowa is improving on most major federal child welfare indicators, especially in efforts to prevent unnecessary child removals. Highlights of the redesign include:

- Creation (in 2010) of a single centralized intake unit to evaluate abuse complaints, helping to prevent regional variations in decision-making.
- Free and voluntary help for low-risk families (the “Community Care” program).
- Expanded use of family team meetings to engage families.
- Pre-removal conferences for parents in all removals in most populous county (Polk). Reduces trauma and accelerates completion of the case.
- Strategies to reduce disproportional representation of children and families of color.
- Regular and public reporting of Iowa’s performance compared to federal benchmarks. <https://dhssecure.dhs.state.ia.us/digitaldashboard/>
- Results-based child welfare service contracts that provide more flexible individualized services for children and families, and which provide incentives for results.
- Permanency for older youth. The DHS provides guardianship subsidies for youth for whom neither family reunification nor adoption are viable, and has a Preparation for Adult Living program for aged-out foster youth.